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HOW STRONG IS MUSLIM HOSTILITY TO A SELF-GOVERNING INDIA?

British Empire Section

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HOW STRONG IS MUSLIM HOSTILITY TO A SELF GOVERNING INDIA?

I. The Official British Position

It is often stated by official British spokesmen that the Muslims in India would not tolerate self-government in that country, whether as a dominion of the Empire or as an independent state, because as a minority they fear rule by the Hindu majority. For this reason if for no other, these spokesmen continue, Britain cannot give India full self-government: the result of such a gift would be civil war and anarchy, or at best a partition of India, according to the program of the Indian Muslim League, into a Muslim state, "Pakistan", and a Hindu state. The latest such spokesman is the Duke of Devonshire, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India, in the House of Lords, February 3, 1942, who said in part: "The claim of the Congress Party....is contested, and always will be contested, by the overwhelming majority of the great Moslem community....who remain unalterably, and I think I can truthfully say increasingly, opposed to being governed by the Congress Party...sooner than accept Congress rule, the Moslems have now formulated a demand for the partition of India under the name of Pakistan. In the face of these facts--and very hard and stubborn facts they are--to whom are we to hand over the government of India?" The Duke's sentiments are in accord with those expressed not long before by Col. Amery, Secretary of State for India, and are to be considered the official position of the British

Government.

II. The Muslim League and Its Strength

It is the purpose of this report to estimate the degree to which this position is justified by the facts. There is no doubt that the Hindu-Muslim antipathy is powerful and deep, and has constituted the major internal obstacle to nationalist success against Britain in the past. But the question that needs answering is whether or not the Muslims really are unalterably opposed to a self-governing India. The Muslim League, second most important political party there, undoubtedly is on record in such terms, as lately as February 13, 1942, when its leader Mr. Jinnah, reaffirming his party's position, said that the Moslem League would continue to non-cooperate with the United Nations in the war unless the British Government should agree to divide India into Muslim and Hindu provinces.

There are precisely two questions to be answered: (1) Does the Muslim League really represent the majority of Muslims in India? (2) Is the Pakistan proposal an unalterable demand even of the Muslim League?

1. The Muslim League is certainly the strongest single Muslim party. However, it is not the only one. Nor is it the only Muslim political party. In the 1937 elections for the provincial legislative assemblies, under the terms of the 1935 constitution, there were in all the provinces of India 482 Muslim seats to be filled. Of these the Muslim League candidates won 108.

In the five provinces where the Muslim-headed ministries were set up, the distribution of seats were as follows:

Province	Total number of seats 1/	Number of seats received for Muslims	Number of seats won by Muslim League
Bengal	250	117	40
Punjab	175	84	1
Assam 2/	108	34	9
Sind	60	33	nil
North-West Frontier 2/	50	36	nil

In the provinces where the ministries were set up with Hindu premiers the distribution was as follows:

Madras	215	28	11
Bombay	175	29	20
United Provinces	228	64	27
Bihar	152	39	nil
Central Provinces and Berar	112	14	nil
Orissa	60	4	nil

It is evident from this recapitulation that the Muslim League commanded only a plurality of the Muslim vote in the 1937 elections. There have been no provincial elections since that time, and it is not possible to estimate the present strength of the party which the Duke of Devonshire claims is increasing.

1/ In every province the Muslims are only one of several minority communities having separate representation as distinguished from the "General" (= Hindu) constituency.

2/ In Assam the ministry was set up by Congress and certain other groups, and given a Muslim premier. The same condition prevailed in the North-West Frontier Province.

There is no necessity for listing the many provincial and all-Indian organizations that contested seats with the Muslim League in 1937. Neither is it necessary to make a laborious effort to learn the absolute strength of the Muslim League. The League has always refused to publish its membership figures, and a guess would be unverifiable. But since the rival, and greater party, the Indian National Congress, has about 3,000,000 out of a "General" community of nearly 300,000,000, it would not be unfair to suppose that the Muslim League has somewhere around 1,000,000 or less of the 90,000,000 Muslims in India. These low figures for party membership are not surprising in view of the small number of Indians who are politically conscious; nor do they indicate lack of power in the parties' hands; for the parties contain the popular leaders who can win mass support for major political movements, though the movements themselves have little real meaning to the masses. The potential following of the League, the Congress, and every other party is, therefore, greater than the actual party strength. But it is important to note that the League has many, though lesser, rivals in the Muslim community itself.

III. Other Muslim Organizations and Leaders

Besides having party rivals the Muslim League does not now have the support of some of the very influential public figures who gave it allegiance as recently as eight months ago. In July, 1941, the Viceroy appointed a National Defense Council of thirty members, and included among them the premiers of the four provinces

which were then operating with provincial representative government as prescribed by the constitution. (In the other privinces the ministries had resigned.) These four provinces were Bengal, with Mr. Fazlul Huq as premier; the Punjab, with Sir Sikander Hyat Khan as premier; Assam with Sir Muhammad Saadulla as premier; and Sind, with Khan Bahadur Allah Baksh as premier. Of these four provincial premiers, three were members of the Muslim League and felt that they owed their political security to the League and were subject to the instructions of its leader, Mr. M. A. Jinnah; these were Fazlul Huq, Sikander Hyat Khan, and Muhammad Saadulla. The fourth, Mr. Allah Baksh, was a long avowed opponent of the League and Mr. Jinnah. When these various premiers accepted appointment to the National Defense Council, they did so as representatives of their provinces. But by an awkward move the government let it appear that they were appointed as members of the Muslim community. Mr. Jinnah, who was opposed to any defense scheme of an undivided India, took advantage of the Government's blunder, and ordered the three premiers whom he could command to resign. They did so, but not with any good grace. Mr. Fazlul Huq made a vigorous speech of protest and Sir Sikander Hyat Khan a little later issued a statement on the necessity of promoting the war and preserving Indian unity.1/ Since Fazlul Huq and Hyat Khan are the two most prominent and influential Muslims holding public office in India,

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1/ Saadulla followed Hyat Khan's example in resigning and appears to have endorsed his more recent moves, though reports have not appeared in our press.

it is clear that their defection from the ranks of Mr. Jinnah's followers has impaired his power.

Of the many Muslim organizations 1/ that do not follow the lead of Mr. Jinnah and the League, the one to act most vigorously in the Azad ("Freedom") Muslim Conference, the special organ of Allah Baksh, premier of Sind. This was organized in April, 1940, by representative Muslim groups such as Majlis-i-Ahrar, the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, the All-India Momin Conference, and others, and met in Delhi April 27-28. with Allah Baksh as president. The daily attendance at those meetings was reported in the press as more than 50,000, and it represents many Muslims, though it would be impossible to check its claim of representing a majority of the community. In its resolutions at that time it repudiated Pakistan, urged the Muslims to work for Indian independence, and supported the demand of the Indian National Congress for a constituent assembly to frame a new constitution on nationalist lines.

Various provincial Azad conferences have been held since and on March 1st, 1942, the all-India Azad Conference assembled again in Delhi, with Allah Baksh in the chair as before. A dispatch from the American Commissioner in New Delhi quotes the conference resolution as stating "that it is imper-

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1/ Aside from specific Muslim organizations not favoring the League, it should be noted that some Muslims belong to the Indian National Congress, including the President of the Congress, and that peasants and workers organizations include many Muslims who take no interest whatever in communal disputes, which constitute the main basis for the League's program.

ative that no effort be spared to unite the people of India into a united endeavour", and expressing "the conviction that there is a general unanimity in India that the country must forthwith cease to be a dependency". "The resolution", continues the dispatch", describes as specious and as an indefensible subterfuge and a mark for their disinclination to part with power the plea of the British government that the Muslim League, as represented by Mr. Jinnah, speaks for all Muslims. In demanding immediate freedom and real transfer of power for the defense of the country to the representatives of the people, the conference associates itself with the Sapru proposals", (which asked for a dated promise of dominion status and an interim provisional Indian government). Finally the resolution urges Mr. Jinnah "to unite at this critical juncture and speak with one voice" (presumably, to have Hindus and Muslims present a united front). The dispatch notes that the Azad Conference has on its board the premiers of Bengal (Fazlul Huq) and the North-West Frontier Province (Dr. Khan Sahib, who was premier until he resigned on November 11, 1939, in protest with the rest of the Khudai Khidmatgar Party, "Red Shirts", against the British refusal to promise India unconditional independence after the war) as well as the premier of Sind (Allah Baksh), who is president.

It is not possible to assess accurately the significance of the Azad Conference's actions, but it stresses the fact that the Muslim League does not represent the whole Muslim community, and that in fact large and influential elements oppose it and

favor a solution of India's constitutional problem on lines of a united and self-governing dominion or nation.

As for the question of the degree to which the Muslim League membership is behind the official League demand for Pakistan, we can note (1) Mr. Jinnah's statement on February 13, that the League program remains unaltered; and (2) the unanimous re-election on February 22, 1942, of Mr. Jinnah as President by the Working Committee of the League. Mr. Jinnah is dictator of the League, and he refuses so far to budge from his position on the question of the partition of India, and has even prophesied revolt in case a government is established in India with the Hindus in control over the Muslims. The League position is clear in words at least, though many observers feel that Mr. Jinnah is using Pakistan as a bargaining point and will ultimately settle for a solution less drastic. So far the League has lost several prominent members, but an internal split has not appeared.

IV. Conclusion

A tentative balance of all the points of the preceding discussion in the report shows that, though there is much Muslim disagreement with Mr. Jinnah, he still wields large influence in the community, perhaps more than any other leader, and the Muslim League is possibly still the dominating organization among Muslims. However, many of the most prominent Muslim leaders and many important Muslim organizations are opposed to Jinnah and to the League's position. The community as a whole is divided, and has elements supporting proposals for a self-governing unified India of the future, Mr. Jinnah and the League to the contrary.